

Exercise and Pregnancy: A Healthy Mix



Regular exercise helps keep the heart, mind and the entire body healthy. It also helps prevent health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, bone loss, anxiety and depression. For many, exercise is an important part of daily life. It's important to know that most women can continue to exercise while pregnant.

When you're pregnant, it's important to keep fit and carefully watch your weight gain. Even if you weren't already exercising, try adding physical activity to your day. Before you start an exercise program, it's important to speak to your health care provider. Daily activity such as vacuuming, making the bed, gardening, and walking can be good ways to do this. Just 10 minutes of activity three times a day, can pay off big in health benefits. There's also an extra bonus to exercising during your pregnancy—it helps ease common pregnancy discomforts like constipation and backache, and will help make you stronger when it is time to deliver your baby.

Important phone numbers that can provide you with more prenatal care information, support and referrals.

March of Dimes 1-888-MODIMES
Resource Center

Southern California Chapter 1-213-637-5050
Northern California Chapter 1-916-922-1913

Or consult your local telephone directory for a chapter near you.

Guidelines to Follow

Once your health care provider has approved your decision to exercise, you should follow these simple guidelines:

- Drink plenty of fluids before and during exercise.
- Don't exercise outdoors on hot days.
- Safe exercises for pregnant women include walking, swimming, and cycling on a stationary bike.
- Exercise regularly at least three times a week.
- Avoid exercising on your back after the first trimester, and long periods of standing still. Both can reduce blood flow to the uterus.
- Stop exercising when you become tired.
- Consult your health care provider about an appropriate diet.
- Don't become overheated, especially in the first trimester. Avoid using a hot tub or sauna.

Exercises to Avoid

If you're not sure about a specific exercise, check with your doctor. You should avoid exercises where you could fall or injure yourself. These include:

- Water-skiing
- Diving
- Snowmobiling
- Horseback riding
- Downhill skiing

Not All Pregnant Women Should Exercise

It's important to keep in mind that not all expectant moms should exercise. Avoid exercising during your pregnancy if you:

- Have had preterm labor in a previous pregnancy.
- Have pregnancy problems.
- Have been informed of fetal development problems.
- Have a history of medical problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease or thyroid disease.

When to Stop Exercising: Look for the Warning Signs

You should stop exercising right away and call your health care provider if you have symptoms such as:

- Breathlessness
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Chest pain or tightness
- Headaches
- Uterine contractions
- Muscle weakness
- Vaginal bleeding

Source: March of Dimes, *mama magazine*, 1998



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1-800-BABY-999